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"MADONNA AND CHILD," MILANESE XV CENTURY.
BY VINCENTO FOPPA
RECENTLY PURCHASED

PICTURE OF MILANESE MADONNA PURCHASED

Almost from obscurity Milan and the Lombard region came into prominence artistically only at the end of the fifteenth century. Unlike Florence and Siena with their great traditions, Milan had been hampered by eclecticism which prevented originality and individuality. In the fourteenth century Milanese painting was Giottesque. Later on Pisanello was humbly followed. The country itself seemed to lack artistic leaders, although with no dearth of artists. The people were wealthy, loving splendor and the display of luxury. And so that which was pretty seemed to please, rather than that which was beautiful, the material in preference to the spiritual.

At the end of the sixteenth century, however, artists were beginning to settle about Milan, having come from Brescia and Vincenza. Vincenzo Foppa drew the attention of the artistic world to Milan. At first following in line with the Pisanello tradition, he later developed his own style. The work of others whom he inspired, such as Leonardo, may well be compared with the greatest of the Florentine, Venetian and Siénesse.

Foppa painted the "*Madonna and Child*" here reproduced, which is now in the permanent collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts. It shows the love of the ornate, perhaps an inspiration from Pisanello. The ample and beautiful figures and the

parapet, recall the work of Giovanni Bellini. Similar niches were often used by Mantegna. These earlier men, like Bramante, were a help to Foppa, the latter in details of architecture. He showed his greatness, however, by taking only the good, assimilating it, and using what he had found merely as a solid foundation for his original creativeness.

The artist was born in Brescia sometime between 1425 and 1430. The Anonimo calls him Vincenzo Vecchio, because of the great age to which he lived. The date of his death is now ordinarily given as between May, 1515, and October, 1516. He has also been called Vincenzo di Zoppa. The first record which we definitely have is 1456, in which he is mentioned as a citizen of Brescia. The same year he seems to have gone to Pavia with his family, where he remained at intervals until 1468. In 1459-60 he was employed by Francesco Sforza for decoration in Milan. In 1461 he was at Genoa working on frescoes which he never completed, returning to Pavia, where once was the signed and dated picture in the Church of the Carmine, now lost. There is very little of his work about Milan, but a number of examples in Pavia, in the department of Luguria, and in Genoa, where he was decorating a chapel from 1469 to 1471. It was formerly thought that he died about 1492 following commis-

sions in Pavia, after the year 1474.

Bernard Berenson, in his catalogue of Foppa's work, mentions thirty examples, a goodly number of which are madonnas. His best work is of Saint Sebastian in the Brera, Milan, and six panels of the altarpiece at Santa Maria de Castello at Savona, painted in 1489.

He has been rated as second only to Giovanni Bellini and Mantegna in Northern Italy. The latter was the giant who brought to Venice a new life, initiating the Golden Age of her Renaissance. Naturalism and strong coloring are characteristic of both men. He is also reminiscent of Bellini in his reds, gold, unctuous black and French gray. His work is not so clearly Venetian in the types themselves as in their poise and relationship to each other. They are graceful and beautiful, but monumental.

The architraves are a cool gray, the walls and Virgin's halo pomegranate red with linear designs in gold. The Virgin's cloak and head-dress are black. Christ's rayed nimbus is a linear design in gold.

The flesh is slightly warm ivory, but without the life of the figures by Bellini. The cloak may have been a deep blue, of which traces seem still evident.

The upper part of the picture is in gold, with the following inscription, in part now destroyed: "*Tota pulcra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te*" ("Thou art all beautiful, well beloved, and there is no sin in thee.") About the halo of the Virgin is inscribed, "*Maria Mater dei memento me Maria*" ("Mary Mother of God, remember me, Mary"). On her pale, light red dress at the neck is written, "*Mater.*" It was in the fifteenth century that the cult of the Virgin was again gaining strength as in the early Byzantine Period.

This madonna has the robustness, the concentration and unity of one who has thought, who has given significance and is emphasizing a message. Like primitive work it has a sincerity and frankness that is more wholesome than the prettiness and affectation of later day painters.

R. P.